

# FACT SHEET: PRAIRIE STRIPS AND TRANSMISSION CORRIDORS

With more than 600,000 miles of operational transmission lines throughout the U.S., there is a significant opportunity for investments in conservation.<sup>1</sup> By establishing native vegetation in these project corridors, developers and private landowners can add value to the rights of way used by electric transmission infrastructure.

## What is a prairie strip?

A prairie strip is a conservation practice that replaces portions of agricultural land with a mix of native grasses and flowers. See Figure 1.<sup>2</sup> Prairie strips are:

- Between a minimum width of 30 feet and an average maximum width of 120 feet.
- Placed around or through a farm field, or within a terrace channel.
- A strip of native vegetation which provides wildlife and pollinator habitat, reduces erosion, and improves water quality.
- An investment in habitat for wildlife and pollinators, and the conservation of soil and water resources.

FIGURE 1. PRAIRIE STRIPS IN THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM



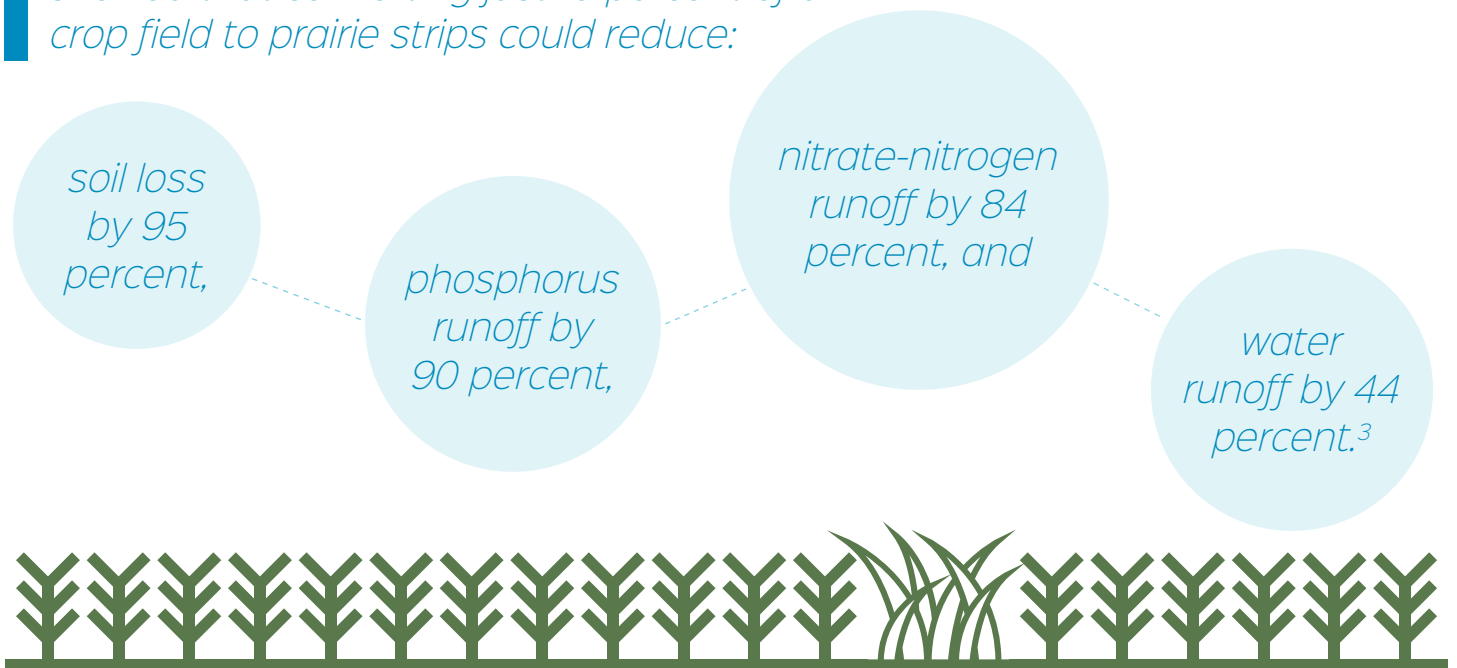
## Sources

<sup>1</sup> "Transmission." Edison Electric Institute, [eei.org/issuesandpolicy/transmission/Pages/default.aspx](http://eei.org/issuesandpolicy/transmission/Pages/default.aspx). Accessed June 2020.

<sup>2</sup> "Prairie Strips in the Conservation Reserve Program." Science-Based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips, Iowa State University, 2020, [nrem.iastate.edu/research/STRIPS/](http://nrem.iastate.edu/research/STRIPS/). Accessed June 2020.



Results from more than eight years of trials showed that converting just 10 percent of a crop field to prairie strips could reduce:



### Prairie strips are eligible for cost-share

In the 2018 farm bill, lawmakers approved prairie strips as an eligible practice under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA) with a goal of enrolling 8.6 million acres of agricultural land nationwide.

- Continuous CRP enrollment lists prairie strips as Conservation Practice 43 (CP-43) within the Clean Lakes, Estuaries, And Rivers (CLEAR) Initiative.
- Subject to eligibility requirements, farmers could enter into 10- or 15-year contracts to implement the practice on land that is actively farmed, or was recently farmed, including land within a transmission line corridor.
- Cost-share benefits through CRP include annual rental payments for the duration of the contract and payments of up to 50 percent of the cost of practice establishment.
- Land must be cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity four of the six most recent crop years and is physically and legally capable of being planted (no planting restrictions due to an easement or other legally binding instrument) in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity.<sup>4</sup>
- Cost-share benefits through CRP include annual rental payments for the duration of the contract and payments of up to 50 percent of the cost of practice establishment.<sup>5</sup>
- Practices within Continuous CRP also receive a 5 percent Practice Incentive Payment and a Sign-up Incentive Payment equal to 32.5 percent of first full year's annual rental payment.<sup>6</sup>

### Sources

<sup>3</sup> "FAQ: Why would I plant prairie strips on my farm?" Science-Based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips, Iowa State University, 2020, [nrem.iastate.edu/research/STRIPS/content/faq-why-would-i-plant-prairie-strips-my-farm](http://nrem.iastate.edu/research/STRIPS/content/faq-why-would-i-plant-prairie-strips-my-farm). Accessed June 2020.

<sup>4</sup> "Fact Sheet: Conservation Reserve Program—Continuous Enrollment Period." U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, December 2019, [fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2019/crp\\_continuous\\_enrollment\\_period-fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2019/crp_continuous_enrollment_period-fact_sheet.pdf). Accessed June 2020.

<sup>5</sup> "Fact Sheet: Conservation Reserve Program, Clean Lakes, Estuaries, And Rivers (CLEAR) Initiative, Prairie Strip Practice (CP-43)." U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, December 2019, [fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2019/crp\\_clear\\_initiative\\_prairie\\_strip\\_practice-fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2019/crp_clear_initiative_prairie_strip_practice-fact_sheet.pdf). Accessed May 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



## Combining prairie strips and transmission

The size of prairie strips and the goal of providing conservation outcomes allows landowners and developers to work together to adopt this practice on private farmland within transmission line corridors.<sup>7</sup> Farmers and project developers contemplating the adoption of prairie strips on private lands within transmission line corridors should also note:

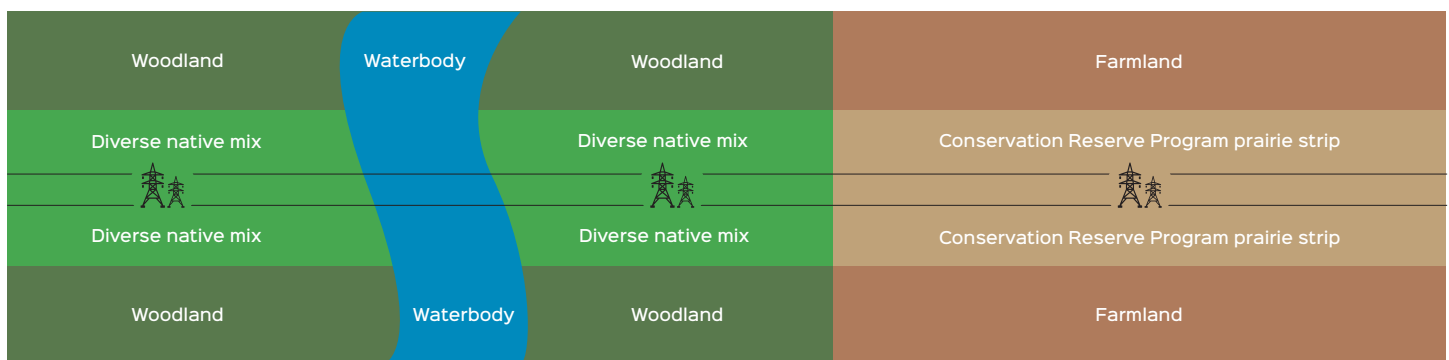
- The width of an individual prairie strip may be adjusted to accomplish the purpose of the practice.
- Prairie strips may not exceed 25 percent of the cropland area per field, but they may be used as a turnaround for normal farming operations. Notably, machinery traffic should be limited as using prairie strips for equipment storage and/or travel lanes would be in violation of CRP contract requirements.<sup>8</sup>
- Developers could form agreements with participating and/or surrounding landowners to manage this vegetation.
- The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has vegetative height requirements depending on transmission line voltage and type. Project developers should consult with legal experts to verify compliance.<sup>9</sup>
- Owners of public land may also qualify for cost-share for prairie strips through CRP if the land is being farmed.

*In Iowa, to help formulate a seed mix to begin a dialogue with retailers and local natural resources professionals, the Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service Prairie Seed Calculator<sup>10</sup> or the Iowa Prairie Seed Calculator offered by the Tallgrass Prairie Center at the University of Northern Iowa<sup>11</sup> could be used.*

## Developers can work with landowners to adopt

Direct consultations, or the inclusion of CRP eligibility resources within lease agreements, could be used to inform private landowners within transmission corridors of this opportunity for conservation investments. Farmers and landowners who are interested in the adoption of prairie strips on their land within a transmission line corridor can get technical assistance with implementation, management, and cost-share eligibility at their nearest USDA Service Center, which can be found by visiting [farmers.gov/service-center-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-center-locator).<sup>12</sup>

FIGURE 2. EXAMPLE OF PRAIRIE STRIPS WITHIN A TRANSMISSION CORRIDOR



## Sources

7 "FSA Handbook, Agricultural Resource Conservation Program." U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, [fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/2-crp.pdf](https://fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/2-crp.pdf). Accessed June 2020.

8 "Tallgrass Prairie Seed Calculator." University of Northern Iowa Tallgrass Prairie Center, [tallgrassprairieseedcalculator.com/](https://tallgrassprairieseedcalculator.com/). Accessed June 2020.

9 "FAC-003-4 Transmission Vegetation Management." Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, [ferc.gov/industries/electric/indus-act/reliability/vegetation-mgt/fac-003-4.pdf](https://ferc.gov/industries/electric/indus-act/reliability/vegetation-mgt/fac-003-4.pdf). Accessed May 2020.

10 "Biology/Plants/Wildlife, Native Prairie Seeding Calculator." Natural Resource Conservation Service Iowa, U.S. Department of Agriculture, April 17, 2020, [nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/technical/ecoscience/bio/](https://nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/technical/ecoscience/bio/). Accessed May 2020.

11 "Tallgrass Prairie Seed Calculator." University of Northern Iowa Tallgrass Prairie Center, [tallgrassprairieseedcalculator.com/](https://tallgrassprairieseedcalculator.com/). Accessed June 2020.

12 "USDA Service Center Locator." U.S. Department of Agriculture, [farmers.gov/service-center-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-center-locator). Accessed May 2020.